

## **Former NHC international student has nationally publicized book**

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He is tall...almost 6'5"...and from the time he was a high schooler in Zambia, his dream was to come to the United States to complete his education.

The youngest of nine children, Kozhi Sidney Makai's plea to travel to the U.S. for college initially fell on his father's deaf ears. "My father, although well-traveled, had never been to the United States thought I would be safer staying closer to home," he said. "It took months to convince him... to see this was something I really wanted to do."

Finally, with help from his mother, Makai's father consented for the 18-year-old to travel to Houston in 1997 and to try for a basketball scholarship at the University of Houston. "I had played on the national team in Zambia, but one of the reasons I wanted to play basketball was because I couldn't afford a college education without a scholarship," he explained. "When I came away from the tryouts without a scholarship, I returned to Zambia."

Still intent on attending college in the U.S., Makai returned to Houston the next year at the invitation of a friend from Zambia whose uncle was sponsoring him. "My friend invited me to stay with him, and since he was living in Spring, I chose North Harris College," he said.

In order to come back to Houston, Makai had to promise his parents he would find a church and become active in its fellowship. "Even though they were apprehensive about me being so far away, my parents knew if God was involved, everything would work out," he recalled.

So, how does a young man who grew up on the family farm in Zambia survive his first few weeks in Houston?

"It wasn't at all scary," Makai admitted. "In fact, for me it was a wonderful adventure. Coming here gave me the opportunity to see the world from a different angle and to look at life differently...and obviously; the pace of life here was very different. Yet, even after all this time, I'm still not sure if I am used to it."

When he first enrolled at North Harris, the young Zambian's goal was to become an architect. In high school, he had taken technical drawing courses and he had drawn plans for his parents when they built a new home.

But, like many college students, Makai's focus changed. "I started taking speech classes. I had always been a talker and had some training for the ministry before I left Zambia,

but when I got into my first college speech courses, I knew that was where I needed to be,” he said.

“During my time at North Harris, my goals had a chance to crystallize and I began pursuing my dreams to be an inspirational and motivational speaker, helping people who are seeking to find who they are and what they want for their lives.”

As a student, he also worked in the college’s admissions and enrollment office, his first real job other than working on the family’s farm. “Of all the offices you can work in and get to know people, it’s the admissions office...and the staff at North Harris was wonderful,” Makai recalled. “They were always there to train you and to explain. Looking back, that job helped me to achieve balance between my studies and the rest of my life.”

In the classroom, the young Zambian found his professors not only were interested in helping him achieve his goals, but also were focused on helping him prepare to move on to a four-year university. “Our classes were small—maybe 15 or so people—so our professors took the time to get to know us and to push us. In my English composition class, for example, my professor often penalized me an entire letter grade because I had mistakes in my work, but because she cared enough to help me learn to write well, I was able to be successful in my classes at Sam Houston State and, later, in my graduate work.”

Only recently, Makai earned his PhD and published his first book, “How Can I Get Up?” which is available at Borders, Barnes and Nobles, [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [authorhouse.com](http://authorhouse.com).

“My book is about finding your place,” he explained. “Some people stop with wanting to achieve certain goals. Because they don’t know how to overcome weaknesses and capitalize on their strengths, their forward progress stops. If we can find out who we are, we can go after the things we want. Until then, we spend our time hoping, searching and dreaming but we are never able to put any action behind those dreams.”

After earning his graduate degrees, Makai has returned to North Harris College, where he teaches speech classes. He also works with area middle school youngsters and is focusing on plans for helping fellow Zambians establish a new university system.

So, what would he tell other young people in Zambia about seeking higher education in the U.S.?

“I would tell them it’s not easy,” he said. “Perhaps their only view of this country is what they see in movies, where people are very relaxed. My experience with Americans has taught me they work hard. They get up every morning, get on the freeways and go to work. If these students want to come here for an education, they must realize that life here is not easy...and the only way to achieve their dreams is by paying the full price. There’s no sale, no discount...you have to pay the full price. When I pay the full price for something, I value it more. So will they.

“Also, when I take time to build relationships, I have to pay the full price. I can’t cut corners, and if I am going to be successful in the U.S., not only do I have to work hard but I also must study hard because I place pressure on myself to contribute. I always wanted to contribute, not just have something given to me.”

“I have heard of people who came here, didn’t put in enough effort and ended up returning home,” he continued. “I would want today’s young people to realize if they really want to make it, they have to pay the full price, do what they came here to do and really focus on those goals.

“From my perspective, I was coming from a country with 10 million people and one university, which doesn’t compare with what NHC has in terms of faculty, facilities, and learning resources for students. I knew that NHC would be a stepping stone to my dreams,” he said. “At NHC, we were trained for the future by faculty who got involved in the student’s work to make certain they were getting it and who cared enough to help us reach our goals.”

Now, as he approaches the end of his formal education, Makai is focusing on the next level of his life with goals to continue speaking and teaching. “We’re working on building an internationally accredited university in Zambia,” he said. “When I did my master’s, I conducted a feasibility study for building such an institution. One of my dreams is to provide opportunities for Zambian students like those I was provided. In fact, I would like to bring North Harris to them.

“That’s my heart – knowing what I’m working on will help people, whether preaching in church, teaching in high school or lecturing in college,” he concluded. “Sometimes all people need to succeed is a little direction and help reaching their goals.

And basketball? “I still play basketball in a league in The Woodlands whenever I have the chance,” Makai said, “and when I go back to Zambia, I sometimes play as a guest player.”

**North Harris College is located at 2700 W.W. Thorne Drive., one-half mile south of FM 1960 E, between Aldine-Westfield and Hardy Roads. For more information about the college, call 281.618.5400 or visit: [www.northharriscollege.com](http://www.northharriscollege.com)**

**North Harris Montgomery Community College District, among the five largest and fastest growing community colleges in Texas, comprises, North Harris College, Kingwood College, Tomball College, Montgomery College, Cy-Fair College, seven satellite centers, and The University Center.**